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Block-time teaching involves instructing a group of pupils for two or more periods a day in two or more subject areas. This enables teachers to know their pupils better. Certain factors, however, are obstacles to achieving the goals of block-time teaching. These include such factors as school administrators who are noncommunicative or whose program scheduling is inadequate, lack of materials, pupils whose wide range of interests and abilities makes it difficult to meet individual needs, subject matter which is difficult to correlate, and the teachers themselves. Educators who are concerned about the need for a move toward core approaches should find ways to change the educational environment.

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ED002271

WHAT ARE THE BLOCKS IN BLOCK-TIME TEACHING?

by

Dr. Genevieve Morger
Dept. of Curriculum Studies
Detroit Public Schools

During recent years educators have looked with some wonder at the continuing growth of block-time programs in our secondary schools. Many status studies are available to those interested in research in this area.[1] Data gathered in a Michigan status study agree that certain aspects of such programs have become significant to the aims of the junior high school curriculum.[2] The major of these aspects is the fact that a block-of-time enables teachers to come to know their pupils better.

Status studies have reported rather consistently that to most teachers block-time means they are with a group of pupils for two or more periods a day and are responsible for two or more subject areas. A majority of these teachers make some effort to reach from one area into another in order to correlate subject matter, but many teach subjects separately using a conventional approach following a pre-determined course of study.

To an advocate of core who views these data there seems to be little evidence that block-time teachers are moving away from traditional teaching in the direction of a problem-solving approach in which content is derived from the needs and interests of pupils, and toward a setting in which scope is not pre-determined. Indeed, one might find few examples of classrooms which provide realistic opportunities for boys and girls to practice freely the skills and techniques of democratic living, that is, the skills that are inherently a part of core.

Regardless of their type of block-time program, however, teachers find themselves hindered by factors which seem to be obstacles to achieving goals. It may be that implied in these are to be found many of the causal factors which keep block-time teachers from moving in the direction of core.

Responses derived from a status survey of 770 Michigan block-time teachers indicate that school administrators constitute an obstacle to a major number.[2] Teachers feel, for example, that program scheduling is inadequate and there is "not enough time to cover requirements or subjects" in the block-of-time. Some feel restricted by rigid curriculum policies which require them to adhere to a course of study or follow a prescribed textbook. It should also be reported, however, that other block-time teachers feel hampered because there are no specifically defined requirements. Perhaps it should be pointed out to the latter group that those who cannot accept freedom for themselves cannot make it possible for others to be free; yet this might well be a core teacher's goal. Finally, when administrators do not communicate their purposes, or when they are non-supportive or display no interest, block-time teachers feel they are held back.

Next to the administrator, the lack of materials, or the kinds of materials which are available, constitute the second largest obstacle to block-time teachers. Many responses in the Michigan study point out that materials assigned for their use are not adapted to the learning abilities of their pupils. An inadequate school library is a very real obstacle to those teachers who are committed to a problem-solving approach, or who focus upon teaching research techniques.

Apparently pupils, too, can be obstacles. Teachers indicated, for example, that pupils limit them when there are problems in pupil-teacher planning, working in small groups, or when they react negatively to block-time classes. Although educators may expect that individuality will be enhanced in the block-of-time, teachers report that individual differences in abilities and needs are an obstacle. They tend to feel there is too wide a range of interests and abilities thus making it difficult to meet individual needs.

How to deal with subject matter is also a concern of block-time teachers. The lack of techniques for correlating two subject areas comprises a major obstacle. Teachers' responses indicate they feel it is difficult to find relationships between two subject areas; they have problems in knowing what and when to correlate. Some, however, do not question how to bring subjects closer together, but rather, how to maintain the independent status of each in the block-of-time. Teachers report that they are concerned because they do not place equal emphasis on English and social studies. They may neglect one subject area in favor of the one which is their own field of competency.

Those teachers who perceive themselves as obstacles to block-time teaching describe feelings of inadequacy about subject fields outside of their college major, the lack of preservice or inservice preparation for block-time teaching, resistance

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to an involuntary assignment to teach block-time classes, and their relationships with other staff members as factors which have negative effects on their teachings.

No doubt block-time teachers will find some support in the realization that they are not alone in the obstacle they face each day in their classrooms. They will realize, too, that what seems to be a barrier to one individual may be a facilitating factor to another. Indeed, on the surface it appears that it is these obstacles which maintain the traditional approaches we find in block-time classes. A core teacher might feel that behind these obstacles lie some feelings of resistance to changing the more readily accepted modes of operating in the classroom. To move from the security of known classroom behavior creates new problems for teachers.

If educators are concerned about the need for teachers to move toward core approaches, they will accept the knowledge that a change in behavior will need to be achieved, and that this change will emerge if administrators and supervisors in the public schools, and instructors in teacher-training institutions, find ways to change the environment.

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[1] Grace S. Wright, The Core Program: Unpublished Research, 1956-1962. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Education, 1963).

[2] Genevieve Morger, "An Evaluation of the Status of Block-Time and Core Teaching in Michigan." (Unpublished Ed.D. Dissertation, Wayne State University, 1963).

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